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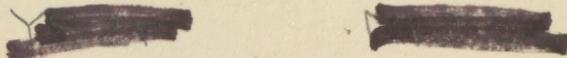
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The RYERSON
POETRY
CHAP-BOOKS



Bits o' Verse in
Scots

by

WILLIAM P. MCKENZIE

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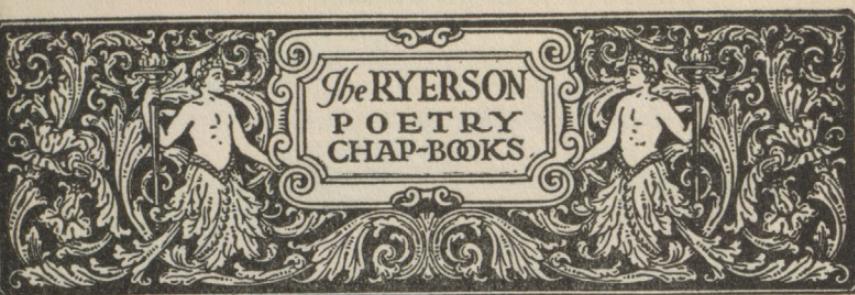
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MR. MCKENZIE has had several volumes of verse published, now out of print. He attended Upper Canada College, and is a graduate of Toronto University. He was war correspondent for *The Mail* during the Riel Rebellion in 1885. After completing his course at Knox College, he took a postgraduate year at Auburn Seminary. Later he was instructor in English Literature and Rhetoric at the University of Rochester. In 1896 he began his continuing service with the Christian Science Publishing Society in Boston. His father came from Edinburgh to be minister of a parish in Ramsay, largely settled by Scottish people. Many of these songs recall memories of their way of speaking.



Bits o' Verse in Scots

By William P. McKenzie



ELSPETH IN CANADA

T'WAS a wee cot hoose, wi' a sand-white floor,
Whaur Elspeth lived wi' her dochter Lize;
Gay marigolds nodded aboot the door,
And sweet peas were daundl't, like butterflies.

At the denner-time they spread nae cloth,—
Nae need o' white on the table o' deal,
Whaur the steamin' tatties lauched, my troth,
Their jackets burstin' wi' glistenin' meal.

They had na the glint o' the hearth-fire licht,
Their fagots were hid in a stove, but that
Could hum wi' a sort o' cheer at nicht,
Like a sleek and black auld purrin' cat.

On braw days you'd think the sun leaned doon
To hear the click o' the knittin' airns
Whaur Elspeth sat ilka afternoon
Aye knittin' o' socks for her wee gran'bairns.

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PS
Bil
Nine sons, nine dochters, the Lord had gien,
Maist o' them mairrit and daein' weel;
She thocht o' them a', and o' what she had seen,
As Lize made a whirr wi' the spinnin'-wheel.

She often thocht o' her dear guidman,
And smiled as if it were jist yestreen
When he, the proudest o' a' his clan,
Had danced wi' her on the village green.

For him she gied her ain folk goodbye,
Happy wi' him on the ship could be;
But her firstborn babe, that passed wi' a cry,
Was ta'en frae her arms an' buried at sea.

Her man langsyne tae his rest has gane,
Her bairns are in hames, frae her carin' free,
So her hale heart turns, as she sits her lane,
To her babe that was laid tae 's rest i' the sea.

• • •

EILY

O EILY, ma bonnie woman,
Though now you are Eily Ban,
You were aince the black-haired dancer,
The bonniest maid i' the clan.

Your hair is snaw-white, Eily,
And young lovers still think you fair,
They're braw wee lads, though I say it,
But I fear them as rivals nae mair.

Since the lads aye call you Gran'mither,
And you're Eily alone for me,
I'm no sae fell jealous aboot them,—
Wee lovers, as high as my knee.

If 'tis winter time wi' us, Eily,
Frae the cauld ye aye keep us warm,
And I and your wee lover-laddies,
We lauch i' the fling o' the storm.

GRANNY

WHEN they put ower muckle spice o' malice in the gossip
Granny would tak' notice until she could na bide,
Then cannily would speak, and this was her rebuking,
"It is better tae keep sweepit up your ain fireside."

When a lad would ken for certain that the pangs o' love are
bitter,
An' weary wi' the thocht that the ways o' life are thrawn,
Granny would speak sagely, if it did na jist bring comfort—
"Ye may lo'e whaur ye wull, lad, ye'll marry whaur ye maun."

When the lad had found at last the paths o' wisdom pleasant,
An' trod her ways o' peace, but walked nae mair alane,
He thocht o' Granny's vision o' fate when she would tell him,
"Ye'll see things wi' a differ' when ye hae a son o' your ain."



THE PIPES

ULD Watty Scot the tailor
Waxin' his thread that squeaked,
Sat crosslegged by his pressin' board,
When the wee lad cam' and keeked.

A secret they had whispered
Aboot the tailor's goose,
'Twas verra dangerous, they said,
If ever it got loose.

Noo Watty was a piper
Wha strutted up and doon,
And the lad, when he was dune wi' wark,
Jist beggit for a tune.

An' sune the drones were lifted,
Wi' tartan ribbons tied,
But when the piper blew a blast
The lad was terrified.

The chanter wailed and shriekit,
So ilka body could ken
The goose was tied up i' the bag,
An' angry to come ben.

P
B

Then swifter than a shadow
The laddie turned to flee,
Till he found the safe place i' the hoose
Upon his mither's knee.

• • •

AMBITION

THERE was aince a wee lad that I mind o' weel,
When they'd hap him in bed at nicht
He'd aye jump up wi' a lauch and squeal
Till they'd let him blaw oot the licht.

He'd watch the cannel-wick's deein' spark,
Like the glint o' a bogle's e'e,
And then wi' a sough snuggle doon i' the dark
As guid as a wean could be.

But he was a bad wee lad, ae nicht,
He waukened the hoose wi' his din;
He'd gotten the glint o' anither licht,—
He wanted tae blaw oot the mune!

• • •

THE BLACKBIRD

THE CLOUDS hung low, the day was dour,
When Mirn and I were wed;
I was fair doited i' the kirk,
I kenned na what was said.

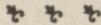
We walked thegither frae the place
Where a' the fowk were thrang,
Then sunlight brak' oot wi' a burst,
And loud a blackbird sang.

I'm widowed noo, and worn wi' care,
Ma tears fa' doon like rain;
Yet when I hear the blackbird's note,
Aince mair wi' love I'm fain.

THE WEE MANNIE

THERE cam' a wee bit mannie
Wi' us at hame tae bide,
Helpless he cam' and trusted
For meat and drink and claes;
And though we haena muckle
Providence wull provide,
Sae the wee bit mannie's welcome
And fear can gang her ways.

Look up in oor happy faces
Wi' your mystery-seein' een,
Stretch oot hands wee and denty
As bonnie as rosy flo'ers;
God's lovelicht is aboot ye
This day as it shone yestreen,
We are leal to the gift an' the Giver,
His bairnie ye are, and oors.



SABBATH-BREAKING

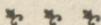
BLITHE was the Sawbath morn,
And blithe wee Jamie sang,
Gran'faither wasna pleased ava'
And grumblin' cam' alang;
Hoot toot, ma lad, nae singin',
This is the Sawbath day,
Gang wi' you buik
Tae the ingle-neuk,
An' think nae mair o' play.

The sun shone bricht on the meadow,
The lambs frisked in the dell,
An' afore he knew, wee Jamie lad
Was whistlin' tae himsel'.
Gran'faither noo was angered
That ane o' his hoose should brak'
The Sawbath day
Held sacredly,
So he gied him a dirl and spak',—

What gars ye be sae wicked,
Hae ye nae conscience-pricks?
Read in yer buik the story, lad,
O' the man wha gaithered sticks,
An' brak' the law o' the Sawbath,—
He didna feel sae braw
When wi' the stanes,
They brak' his banes,
Thae days o' Moses law.

Jamie awhile sat solemn,
Says he, wi' a glint frae his een,
I kenna aboot thir sticks,
I gaithered mine yestreen;
But I heard the plover's wheeple,
And the blackbird whistlin' clear,
And the throstle sing
Whaur the lilacs hing,
And ilka singer was dear.

Behold the fowls o' the air,
Was what I read the noo,
I heard their joy, an' afore I thocht
I was jist whistlin' too;
Ae day I learnt the carritch,
Till the chief end o' man I kenned,
But for a wee lad
Jist to be glad,—
Is that no a lad's chief end?



MAKIN' THE BEST O'T

THE PUIR auld miller has an awfu' scoldin' wife,
Aye, aye, the puir auld man;
But he's douce wi' it a',
And he tak's the guid o' life,
And he lauchs, aye, he lauchs when he can.

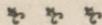
I was doon by his mill, wi' its screekin', clackin' soun',
My, my, what an awfu' din to be;
But the miller frae the dust,
Whaur the wheels were whirrin' roun',
She aye gaes clackin', but she grinds, quo' he.

THE RINAWA' BAIRNS

A TOWSIE-HEIDED lassie,
A laddie wi' bare feet,
Gaed haun' in haun' thegither
Toddlin' doon the street;
They rin' awa' frae mither,
She gaed them baith their paiks,
Catched them i' the pantry
Eatin' up her bakes.

Syne they heard the burnie
Gurglein' aneath the brig,
An' saw a hoose ayont it
Wi' a' its gairden trig;
Said Geordie, "That wee hoosie
Wull be oor hame the noo—
But on the brig afore him
Was a maist monstrous coo!

She glowered upon the bairnies
And shook her muckle heid,
They gied a squeal for mither,
And didna lack for speed
As haun' in haun' thegither
They pattered up the street,
A lassie towsie-heided,
A laddie wi' bare feet.



AULD GRUMLIE

BETTER she hadna been ony man's wife,
Than to wed wi' auld Grumlie;
Better she hadna been mairrit ava'
Than to dree a lang life
Wi' clashin' and strife,
Like a burn flowin' drumlie.

He glunches at sunshine, and growls at the rain,
Sour-visaged auld Grumlie,
When he buys or he sells he yaumers o' ill;
Think ye o' her pain,
Wha hears wi' disdain,
But maun bear it a' dum'ly.

And yet, wad ye think it? she's guid tae the chiel,
Puir glowrin' auld Grumlie,
He grum'les, says she, but he's kind wi' the weans;
(Gie his due tae the deil)
We get on unco weel,—
And she's aye snod and comely!

* * *

THE USUAL WAY

I WAS fu' o' content in ma hoose alane,
By the mill-pond's head;
I wroghte i' the mill, wi' a richt guid will,
Tae earn ma bread.

But a lassie cam' frae the hillside far,
And smiled on me,
The warl' grew tame, ma heart was flame
At the glint o' her e'e.

My love I gied her and bade her come hame,
But I'm lanely still;
For she wed Tam Dee, and lauched at me,—
Tam owned the mill.

* * *

A PRAYER ANSWERED

THERE cam' a blawin' wind, ae nicht,
An' shriekit below the door;
On the window-pane the drift-snaw hissed,
And I felt the big waves roar.

I drew ma creepie fornenst the fire,
And drapt ma chin in ma haun'
As I prayed that the God o' the sea wad bring
My lad and his ship tae laun'.

Spring cam', an' the broon sweet-smellin' yird
Was pierced wi' the crocus spears,
When I saw my lad i' the door-way staun',—
Then I couldna see, for ma tears.

PRIDEFU' JOHNNIE

WHY should he walk his lane, Dearie?
Why should he walk his lane, my love,
When the bonnie lass o' his heart's desire
Is fain to sit by his ain hearth fire?
But he winna see it, and passes by her,
Gangin' aboot his lane.

Wha will open his een, Dearie?
Wha will open his een, my love,
Wha will show him the joy o' the nest,—
That wander he may, east coast tae the west,
A fireside neuk that's a hame is best,
Wha will open is een?

When the pride o' life is done, Dearie,
When the pride o' life is done, my love,
And anither self he can cherish dear,
And he kens that love's mair worth nor leär
He'll come tae himself', and hame, dinna fear,
When the pride o' life is done.

* * *

DAVIE

HEAR whit they say o' Dauvid, wife!
They hae him on a convict ship
Penned up wi' criminals cast oot,
Like lepers wha wi' clout at lip
Maun cry, Unclean!
Aye, had the lad been dumb or deef,
Or blin'—aye, that wad be a grief—
But son o' mine to be a thief!
He's no a son o' mine, Woman.

The Wife:

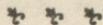
I mind the nicht oor son cam' tae's,—
Ye'll no forget that Februar' storm,
The rowth o' peats tae keep us warm;
And we hae spent baith love and gear
For oor littlest son; but dinna fear,
They may take him far, his love bides here,
Oor littlest son, oor Davie.

The Man:

Ye aye were saft at heart, guid wife,
Ye made me spare the lad lang syne,
And noo God lays on me the stripes
O' this disgrace that son o' mine
Should be a thief.
Disgrace drags wi' me at ma wark
Like pleugh behin' the new-yoked stirk,
Men jeer i' the market and at kirk—
But a thief's nae son o' mine, Woman.

The Wife:

Nae thief but a son was born o' me!
Oor guid Lord hangin' upo' the cross
Said tae a thief there would be nae loss,
But life renewed i' paradise;
We mauna condemn, it's no richt wise,
Think o' God's maircy I would advise
For oor sorrowfu' lad, oor Davie.



ROBIN

WHY should rantin' Robin be sic a happy man,
Wi' his lauchin', an' his daffin,
And his kind guid word for ilka body?
The bairns in arms they crow tae him,
The weanlin's peek-a-bo tae him,
And onybody's guid eneuch to win frae him a smile.

You haena seen his hoosie then, just back ayont the brae,
Wi' laylocks, an' wi' hollyhocks,
And roses' breath to greet a body?
By wild thyme borders the pansy shows,
By the wall the spicy tansy grows,
But the lauchin' rose within the door is the bonniest flo'er
the while.

Do ye wonder at his happiness an' joy that overflows
In his lauchin', and his daffin,
And words o' cheer for ilka body?
Aye, since a guid wife blesses him,
There's nocht o' care distresses him;
And he blesses a' the village wi' his guid-will and his smile.

BY THE TREE O' DOOL

THEY brocht three thieves to the gallows tree,
Three men wi' faces wae,
A' the fields were green, but their shackled feet
Rustled amang the strae.

The horse i' the cairt was wae for them
And nuzzled to ane as he passed;
A dug cam' an licked ae man's bare haun',
A wee lad grat for the last.

They had ta'en a life in the heat o' rage,
Noo wi' dread their hearts were chilled
As they lookit abune tae the hempen rape,
And thocht o' the lad they had killed.

But the heavenly po'ers mean love, which a man
When dreein' his weird may ken;
'Twas love and the warmth o' love cam' doon
Wi' the sunshine on thir three men;

For a lav'rock sprang frae a tuft o' grass
And flooded wi' music the air,
And the lives o' the lads wi' the sang went forth,
While the fowk stood silent wi' prayer.

* * *

SANDY AWAKE

TWAS jist the maist glorious day in June
And balm was i' the air,
Breezes and sunlight were in tune
Wi' a joy you could scarcely bear.

Sandy had toiled for sax lang days,
The kirk had been steeikit and still
Where the folk were singin' in dolorous praise,
And the minister prayed wi' a will.

A bit o' a window was open a wee,
But instead o' the breeze comin' in
There cam' but a boomin', bumblein' bee,
That hummed wi' a sootherin' din.

The sairmon hadna aince catched fire,
The minister was new,
When his mither saw Sandy droop wi' tire,
And gart him stand up i' the pew.

The exceeding sinfulness o' sin,
Said the preacher, brought a blicht—
When a coo at the window lookit in,
And mooed wi' a' her micht.

Sandy a moment didna ken
But he heard the judgment horn,
Rousin' the sleepers in a' the glen
To rise for the waukrife morn.

Auld man that Sandy is, he minds
That loud arousin' moo,
And a joy in memory he finds
The sairmon frae the coo.

• • •

THE BEACON

OLADDIE, come hame frae the sea,
I'm needin' thee sair the nicht;
Whaten a joy 't would be
Should I see in the flickerin' licht
A form wi' a glist'ning e'e,
A face wi' its heart-love bricht,
And ma heart should ken it was thee!

Tae the headland aboon the sea,
I slip frae the hoose, alone,
I crooch doon there on ma knee,
On the grund by the beacon-stane;
And the fire sun'e leaps for thee,
To guide thee, ma laddie, ma ain,—
To shine far oot ower the sea,
To tell how ma heart is fain,
And flames up wi' love for thee!

LONGING

O LASSIE ayont the sea,
Wi' the freshness an' joy o' the sea i' thy life,
Come hither to me
Like a breeze o' the sea,
Like a breeze o' the sea
As fragrant and free,
Come thou like a breeze o' the sea!

If only I were afloat,
In my ship on the waves o' the sea,
Breasting the waves and sailing to thee!
But here am I chained to a place,
Ma een canna gaze on thy face;
Yet high in the heaven dear thochts are afloat,
Like moonbeams at nicht
They are wingèd wi' licht,
To thy bosom, dear lass, is their flight,
Like the homin' o' doos to their cote.

O Lassie ayont the sea,
God gie thee the strength o' the sea i' thy life!
When the storms oversweep,
Thy peace be as deep
As the ocean-depths keep
When the storms oversweep,
Thy peace be as deep as the sea!



SAIR TAE BIDE

IT'S SAIR tae bide when thou'rt awa'
The flo'ers 'll no forget;
Of thee they're dreamin' ilka nicht
When the gowden sun has set.

It's sair tae bide when thou art here,
I'm hauden by a spell,
Ma heart owerfu', and like tae brak'
Wi' love I daurna tell.

It's sair tae bide when wantin' thee,
I'm like ane lost frae hame;
The soughin' wind amang the trees
Keeps whisperin' aye thy name.

Sae bidena thou ower-lang awa',
Come thou when May is here
And change ma bothy tae a hame,
Ma bonnie lass, ma dear.

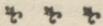


THE CHIEF'S SON

THHERE'S nane like him
Sae leal and tender hearted,
The son o' a noble sire;
There's nane like him,
He is the best belovèd,
He is oor heart's desire.

Low lies the chief,
Braw wi' the tartan,
Girt wi' his sword;
Low lies the chief,
In his haun' nae valor,
Frae his lips no a word.

The lad is oor chief noo,
Lang has he been heart's dearest
An' we are a' his men;
The lad is oor chief noo,—
Wha is there wadna follow
Tae hell an' back again?



UNWORTHINESS

OLASSIE wi' the raven hair,
There's nocht for thee I wadna dare;
And yet it's a'maist like despair
To think that thou dost lo'e me.

The western breeze gaes whisperin' by,
And clouds are fleein' ower the sky
On wings o' licht—eigh, what am I
That ever thou shouldst lo'e me?

Mair pure than cloud might ever be,
The breath o' God doth carry thee;
I'm naething but an earth-fast tree,
How canst thou ever lo'e me?



GRETA

TWAS i' the kirk I saw thee clear
The last time, the last time,
An' ye were shinin'-like, ma dear,
Wi' blue eyes glowin' kind.
An' then there cam' tae mind
The hopes that died unspoken,
The promise never broken;
I did na ken it was fareweel
The last time!

Far frae the dour folk sittin' by
Ye were tae flit, ye were tae flit;
The mystic licht was comin' nigh,
It was within a glowin' grace,
It was reflekit in your face
That shone wi' utter kindness
For dull folk i' their blindness;
How was't I didna ken, that day,
Ye were tae flit?

Ye'll hae the bonnie angels noo
Tae minister, tae minister,
Dear lass, sae delicate and true,
Earth wasna worthy o' your charm,
It could na fend your life frae harm;
Noo at the well the wheel is broken,—
But memory will guard the token
Mine was the joy, while ye were here,
Tae minister.

L'ENVOY TO SCOTLAND

MY FORBEARS knew the land of song and story;
They walked the banks of Tweed, saw distant blue
Of Eildon Hills; and tales of derring-do
Would boast, and tell of many a Border foray;
Fair Edinborough's town and Castle hoary
And heroes of old time they loved anew,
Mountains and lochs and troutng burns they knew,
And moonlit aisles of Melrose in their glory.

O rugged men, and women brave and true,
Let scoffers gibe, ye had your work to do;
In panic, your firm faith hath been defence,
Facing grim death and fear ye have not swerved
But led the leaderless with common sense,
So hath your little land the whole world served.

THE RYERSON POETRY CHAP-BOOKS

Lorne Pierce—Editor

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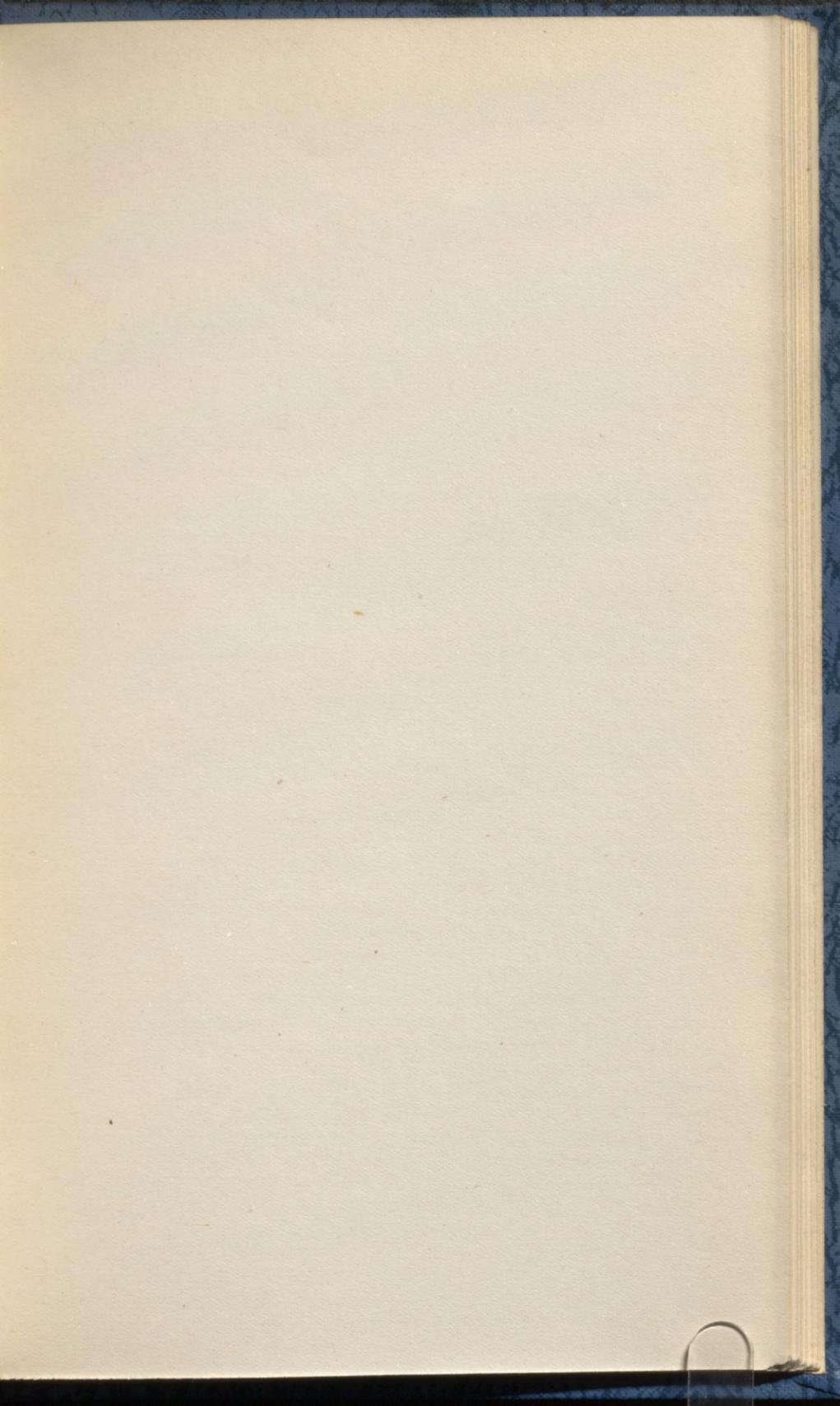
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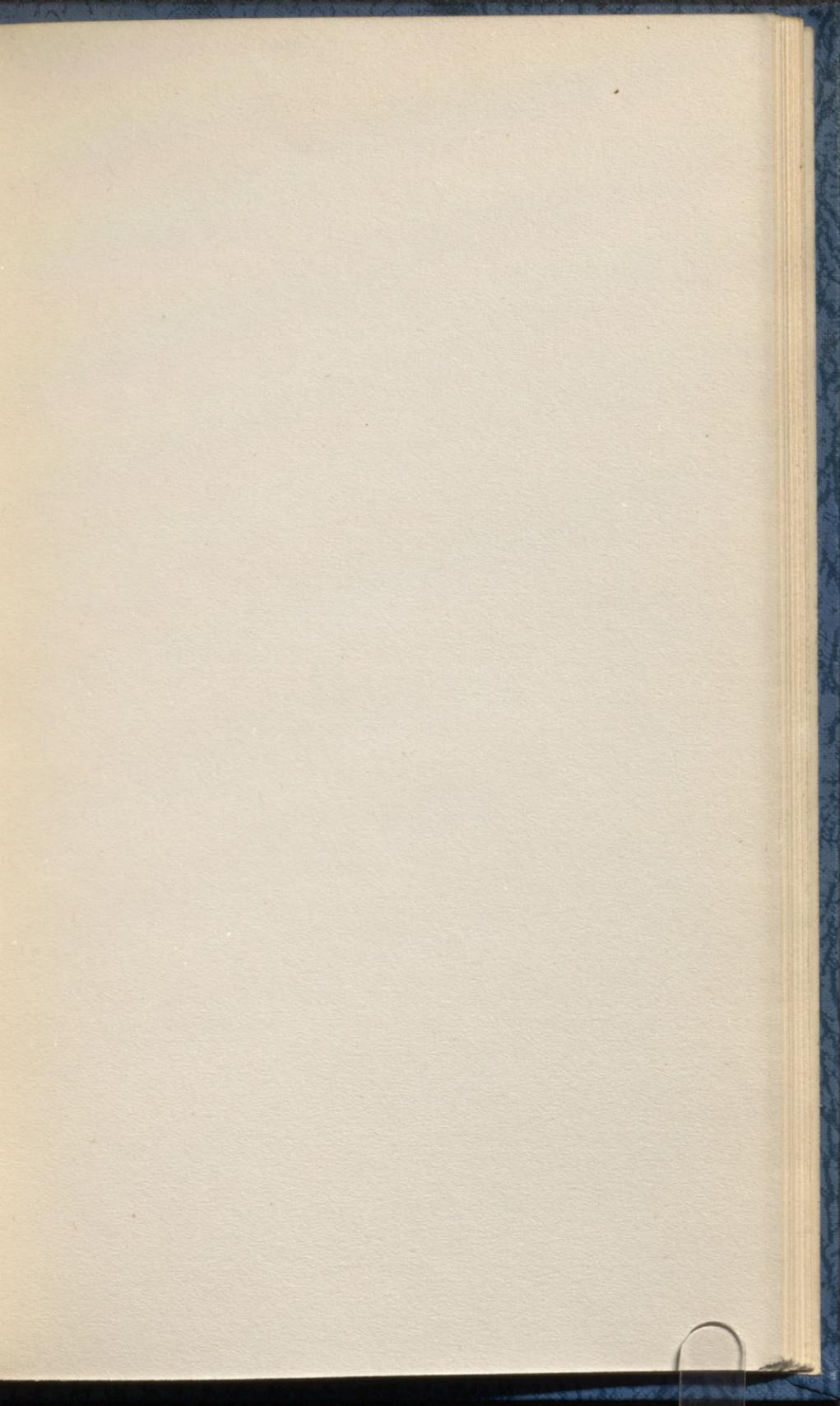
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